



The Enlisted Perspective

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Raising the Standard: Enlisted Dormitories

The ultimate source of combat capability resides in the men and women of the Air Force and our junior enlisted personnel are the foundation of that capability. Highly educated and motivated, our enlisted force today is the best in the world. How we take care of, mentor, and lead this force is inextricably linked to readiness, recruitment, and retention.

For our unaccompanied airmen, Air Force dormitories and how we manage them are critical to their development process. The Secretary of the Air Force, Dr James Roche, Chief of Staff of the Air Force, General John Jumper, and I are dedicated to ensuring we provide a high-quality unaccompanied living environment that balances the needs of our airmen with the needs of the Air Force.

The Air Force has good dormitories, and we are making them better. We recently updated the one-plus-one dormitory standard to a new "Dorms-4-Airmen" standard. The previous standard provided each airman an 11-square meter room with a shared kitchen and a shared bathroom. The new standard provides a larger private room (up to 17 square meters), a private bathroom, and four airmen will share a larger common kitchen/living area. This new standard is a clear improvement for our airmen. It provides more privacy while increasing social interaction in a larger, better-equipped common area. The Air Force has included one billion dollars in the current President's budget to build new dormitories to this standard. This clearly shows our commitment to improving unaccompanied living standards.

Besides improving the physical standards of the dormitories, we're also changing the policy that determines who is required to live in them. In the past, all unaccompanied airman in the ranks of Airman Basic through Senior Airman were required to live in the dormitories. The new policy will only require our Airman Basic through Airman First Class and those Senior Airmen with less than three years of service to reside in the dormitories. In the future Senior Airmen and above with more than three years of service will be allowed to live off-base, with some variations based on local housing availability and unique circumstances. Implementation guidance will be forthcoming that will provide timelines and details. This approach better reflects the maturity level and quality

of our junior enlisted force without jeopardizing the mission or our leadership focus on our newest airmen.

How we manage the airmen living in the dormitories is perhaps the most important aspect of our dormitory issue. We often hear that we should allow most airmen to move off base and treat our dormitories the same way we treat base housing. Those who share this opinion often base it on the belief that if they are old enough to go to war and die for their country, then they are old enough to live in privacy. We disagree. We do not simply send these young airmen off to do battle. They are led into battle. Someday they may be called upon to lead our future airmen into battle, and it's essential that they be trained properly from the start. This development and training extends into their private lives and living quarters. An Air Expeditionary Force requires trained warriors and leaders of warriors, and it is the first three years of an airman's career that are the most critical in shaping these future NCOs.

We rely heavily on Commanders, Command Chiefs, First Sergeants, Supervisors, and other senior leaders to help shape our future enlisted force. The importance of leadership involvement in our airmen's lives cannot be overstated -- it's critical to providing the needed mentoring and leadership in our dormitories. That is why we've mandated that we continue the current policy of unit integrity to ensure accountable leadership in each of our dormitories, quicker recall response times, esprit-de-corps, and buddy-care among airmen who live and work together.

Secretary Roche, General Jumper, and I remain dedicated to ensuring our dormitories are well maintained and well managed. These policy changes improve the living environment, enable us to better mentor and develop new airmen during their early years, and reinforce our focus on unit integrity in our approach to dormitory life. Thank you for your continued dedication to our great nation.



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